

# AN EVANGELICAL APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF FEAR OF DEATH

Richard J. Gehman

## INTRODUCTION

From the study of the Bible and after much discussion with Christians in Africa, the author concludes that the solution to the problem of the fear of sickness and death, is to be rightly related to Jesus Christ. People must be taught thoroughly the riches and fullness of their salvation. Salvation includes: (1) being declared righteous before God through faith in Jesus Christ (justification); (2) growing in faith and obedience to Jesus Christ (sanctification); (3) being perfected and receiving resurrection bodies at the return of Jesus Christ (glorification).

Christians must be taught that death for them is gain, for they will be with Christ in heaven immediately after death. They must understand that Christ's death has brought victory over death. Through Christ's death the penalty for their sin has been completely paid and Satan, the chief enemy of their soul, has been absolutely defeated. Thus the powers of darkness (the evil spirits) have no authority over the believer. Christians must be taught the blessed hope of the believer, the second coming of Christ. By centring their hope on Christ and his return the believers will be able to persevere with hope during times of sickness and death. By receiving Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour and being taught of their future hope in Him, Christians will be able to stand strong in their faith through the power of the Holy Spirit.

What has struck the author over the years is the great gulf which separates the ideas of many theologians in Africa (who became known throughout the world by their books), and the beliefs of the average Christian known to him in Kenya. This has been a growing impression of his over the last thirty years of serving in Kenya.

---

This chapter article is printed with permission from the Publisher: "The book *Who are the Living Dead* by Richard Gehman (ISBN 9966-20-088-6) is published by Evangel Publishing House, Nairobi, Kenya"

Before writing this book the author decided to sit down once again over a period of some months with nearly one hundred men and women whose homes were in every part of the country and beyond, and who were studying at Moffat College of Bible in Kenya. They were Gikuyu, Akamba, Nandi, Luhya, Luo, Masai and Gusii. Although most of them were with the Africa Inland Church in Kenya, numbers of them were with other churches and from other countries in Africa. They agreed that the problem of death and the living-dead was very real in their own churches. They were also united on what they saw as the solution to the problem.

Their many suggestions may be reduced to these two simple, basic ideas: the need for the people to have a right relationship with Christ, and to have adequate teaching from the Word of God.

Developing these ideas, we may say that salvation, full and complete, must be known and experienced by the people of Africa today. People need to know the Lord and be nurtured and taught in the Word of God. The churches need to be renewed, for they are too self-satisfied with their tradition of piety. If the people were truly born again, walking in the Spirit and growing in their knowledge of God's will from the Scripture they would be delivered from the fear of sickness, death and the living-dead.

Following are some practical and pastoral suggestions which come from these Christians in Kenya. Their basic ideas have been developed further through additional research by the author. These suggestions are an alternative approach to the ideas suggested by the theologians in Africa surveyed earlier in this book.

### **The Biblical Solution to the Fear of Death and the Living-Dead**

A personal knowledge and experience of salvation is the only true solution to the fear of death and the living-dead. Salvation that is full and complete has three stages: (1) being saved from the penalty or punishment of sin when we receive Christ as our Saviour (this is the past tense of salvation and took place when each believer was born again; in theology this is called "**justification**"); (2) being saved from the power of sin (this is the present tense and takes place throughout the life of the Christian; in theology this is called "**sanctification**"); and (3) being saved from the very presence of sin (this is the future tense and

will take place when Christ returns again in glory; in theology this is called “glorification”).

## **JUSTIFICATION – Being Declared Righteous – a Past Experience**

### **1. People need to be saved, coming to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.**

As we leave the 20<sup>th</sup> century and begin moving beyond the year 2000 AD, we find Africa a very different continent from the one we read of 150 years ago. When the gospel was brought to the shores of Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was much opposition to Christianity. The hold of the family and clan on individuals was very real. People who became Christians did so at a great price. They were persecuted for their faith and even thrown out of their families. This opposition continued in many areas until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond.

But today in many countries south of the Sahara, Christianity has become an accepted part of present-day society. In many ways baptism has replaced initiation rites. Part of tradition today in the churches is for the young people to be enrolled in catechism classes, preparing them for baptism. No questions are asked. The church leaders do not ask, “Have these young people been saved?” Baptism is what every person wants in order to become a fully grown adult in present-day culture, either in the marketplace or in catechism class.

As a result, churches are being filled with people who are Christian only in name. The younger people under the age of 15, who form 50% of Africa’s population, may attend church but may not have been saved. More than that, many individuals who have grown up in churches and been educated in church schools, hold important positions in business, government and education. But many of these second or third generation “Christians” are nominal at best. They have adopted the outer form of Christianity but fail to follow the ways of Christ. They have been baptised, have a “Christian name,” are church members, attend church and may even sing in the choir and hold leadership positions in the church. But they may not have been born again.

A very strange and unbelievable thing has happened. The western nations (with the Christian churches which took the gospel to the two-thirds world) and Africa have changed (reversed) their positions. The West was Christian in name in the past. If in 1950 you had asked an American, “Are you a Christian?” the

likely reply would have been, "Do you think I am a pagan?" But today, with the decline of a living, evangelical Christianity in the West, numbers of Americans and Europeans are now publicly and openly admitting that they are pagans – really and truly pagans. They are following the religious rites, practice and beliefs of their pagan ancestors.

We read of Americans returning to the ancient Norse pagan cults, complete with animal sacrifice. They meet out-of doors in nature's temple, "drawing down the moon" and inviting the gods and spirits into their fellowship. Many other Europeans and Americans are outside the church and opposed to anything that is Christian. They work hard in official, public places to undermine and destroy Christianity.

But in Africa, formerly known as the Dark Continent, very few desire to be known as followers of African Traditional Religion. When the census is taken and people are asked, "What is your religion?", they respond, "Christian," "Muslim" or "Hindu." Very, very few claim to be followers of African Traditional Religion. Nominal Christianity is everywhere in Africa today. And without a healthy, live, evangelising and discipling church, the future for Christianity is very dark indeed.

If people are not Christian in their hearts but only wear the clothing of Christianity (baptism, church membership and church attendance), Christ cannot meet their needs during times of sickness and death. They will quickly return to traditional solutions during those times when they have serious problems.

## **2. People who are converted to Christ must make a complete break with everything associated with witchcraft and the witchdoctor.**

Born-again Christians may continue to be oppressed by demons if they do not make a complete break with all their ties with the living-dead. Every object of sorcery and witchcraft which they own must be destroyed. Even the items received from the witchdoctor must be burned. It would appear that the evil spirits are closely tied to certain objects. These objects should be destroyed completely if complete deliverance is desired. Friendship with mediums must also be broken. Friends who may have contact with the spirit world may have demonic influence over a person. Those friendships must be broken, even if they are close relatives.

When people turn from Satan to Christ there must be a complete break. The church has known and practised this for many years. Whenever an adult comes to personal faith in Christ, if he was known to have visited a witchdoctor or to have practised witchcraft, he is asked to renounce this through a public service.

Under the leadership of the pastor and elders, the person presents to them all the charms, fetishes and materials associated with the mystical powers of witchcraft, sorcery, white magic, black magic, and the living-dead. White magic must be rejected as strongly as black magic. Whether these items were intended to harm others or to defend the family from witchcraft, they must be brought to the public Christian service. The service includes singing, prayer, a message from the Word of God, and a personal testimony of faith in Christ and the rejection of Satan and all the powers of darkness. A fire is built and the materials burned while the Christians sing hymns of victory and triumph.

Conversion to Christ is always a direct turn-about. Salvation means the rejection of the kingdom of darkness and the acceptance of Christ, an entrance into the kingdom of God. But for those who in one way or another had direct association with the powers of darkness, there must be a complete break and a rejection of the past. Satan is real and the powers of his kingdom are real. For anyone to receive complete deliverance there must be a total break with all those things, and with the people who are associated with the occult.

Christians are strengthened when they see the power of Christ in the destruction of these things. In one place a witchdoctor died and left many things in his room, including a bag containing the tools of his trade. People were warned not to touch the bag. They feared that it would cry out when touched. But the pastor had courage. He took the bag and burned it. People were amazed that nothing happened to the pastor. Many people were saved as a result of his testimony to Christ's power.

### **3. Believers must be taught that salvation is by God's grace, only through faith.**

Many Christians do not understand the nature of their salvation. They simply do not understand the biblical doctrine of justification by the grace of God, through personal faith alone. Somehow there remains a belief that they can lose their salvation if they sin. Christians continue to live with fear and uncertainty, not knowing whether they are right with God.

This is not merely a question of correct doctrine. Biblical theology is closely related to our walk with God. Whenever Christians live with doubts and fears, they cannot know and experience the nearness and love of God. If they do not know whether they are ready to meet God when they die, they will be filled with fear when faced with sickness and death.

Martin Luther was a very intelligent young man who wanted to know God and his grace. At the University of Urfurt in Germany he had earned a Master's degree in liberal arts and was planning to attend law school. But all this was changed when he nearly died during a thunderstorm. He cried out in fear, "Help, Saint Ann, I will become a monk."

After making this vow, Martin Luther entered the monastery of the Augustinian Hermits. His one goal inside the monastery was to find the God of grace. "In the monastery I did not think about women, money, or possessions, instead my heart trembled and fidgeted about whether God would bestow [give] His grace on me" (Oberman 1982:128).

Trying to know God's smile of love, mercy and favour, Martin Luther tried the way of works, denying himself in order to please God. The life of a monk was hard as he tried to kill his own will. He ate little food, wore coarse (rough) clothing, worked hard during the day, prayed during the night, fasted, begged for food and denied the desires of the flesh. But his conscience always bothered him; he did not experience peace with God. Luther came to hate God, for He always stood as the Judge and was never satisfied with his works of self-righteousness. Why was God so demanding? Why could Luther not enjoy peace and joy and a sense of God's presence? Why did he not know that God had forgiven him?

Despite all this self-effort to earn salvation he lacked peace and assurance in his heart. "For I had strayed from faith," said Luther, "and could not imagine that I had angered God, whom I in turn had to appease by doing good works" (Oberman 1982:128).

Some years later he was sent to Rome on business for his monastery. This pilgrimage to the "holy" city was Martin Luther's great opportunity to earn his salvation. He celebrated mass daily. He was even sorry that his parents were still alive for he would have been able to help them escape purgatory through

this pilgrimage (visit to Rome), touching the relics of the saints, praying at holy shrines and saying mass in many churches.

Trying to please God he climbed the stairs called the Santa Scala on his knees. On each step he prayed "Our Father," for it was believed that you could save a soul by climbing the steps in this way. But on the top step doubt filled his heart. "Who knows if it is really true?" Years later Luther's son recalled a conversation he had with his father about this experience. "My dearest father told me," said Paul Luther, "that when he was climbing up the Santa Scala and praying at every step he suddenly remembered the words of St. Paul: the just shall live by faith" (Oberman 1982:150).

Whether or not Paul Luther's report is correct, the Protestant Reformation began with this understanding: that peace with God does not come with human effort or good works, trying to please God. Being saved is possible only through faith in Christ who gave his life as a sacrifice for our sins.

Jesus Christ paid the debt for our sin when He died on the cross. Salvation is a free gift. We cannot earn God's favour nor can we merit God's forgiveness. When we repent of our sin and receive by faith this offer of salvation, we are saved. Jesus Christ alone is our hope. He has paid our debt on Calvary. We were neither saved by doing good works, nor are we kept saved by doing good. It is all of grace (Galatians 2:15f; 3:1-3, 10-14).

When people truly experience and understand the grace of God that saves them, their consciences are cleansed and their hearts are filled with hope and joy. They do not fear the day when they will stand before God. For they know that they have been clothed with the righteousness of Christ. So they have no fear of sickness or death.

**4. Most Christians lack assurance of salvation and so they are afraid to die. They need to know the biblical basis for the assurance of their salvation.**

Here is an experiment for you to try. Tell this story to various Christians and then ask the question. A person had been saved for several years and had served the Lord faithfully. Then one day he had a disagreement with his wife. He became so angry with her that he beat her without mercy. In the middle of this fight he suddenly had a heart attack and died. The question is this: "Will he

go to heaven or to hell?" Many Christians in Africa will answer, "He will to go hell."

That theology (or the lack of a biblical theology) which teaches that you may lose your salvation shows a failure to understand God's great and wonderful salvation, and the grace of God which makes that salvation possible. Many Christians do not understand that they are born *once* into God's family. Though they may displease the Father and lose fellowship with Him, they do not cease to be His children.

Many pastors are afraid to teach the grace of God for fear that God's grace will encourage people to sin. They also fear to preach on the assurance of salvation. If Christians are sure that they are saved, if they know they will go to heaven when they die, will this not lead them to sin? So pastors preach against sin, warning people against the evils of sin so that they will be afraid to sin. Most of the Christians with whom the author spoke had never heard a sermon on the assurance of salvation before going to Bible College. Many pastors seem not to have read the book of Romans where Paul deals with this very question (see Romans 6:1f).

One young man in Kenya believed that heaven was only for the righteous. Therefore, even a saved person might fear the loss of his salvation if he fell into sin.

As we spoke to these students at Moffat College of Bible about this problem, there was one exception, a young man who was saved in 1982. He had the assurance of his salvation before coming to college. He attended catechism and there learned from his pastor about the grace of God, the basis for his salvation. This pastor had been trained in a Bible School.

But in many areas there are few trained pastors so that Christians learn their theology from untrained elders. Some churches, of course, have an Arminian theology and therefore teach their pastors in Bible Schools that people can lose their salvation whenever they sin. Wherever Christians have little Bible teaching and are surrounded by churches which do not believe in the security of the believer, they are bound to fear the loss of their salvation. Without assurance of salvation people will naturally fear sickness and death, for they will be afraid that they are not ready to meet the Lord. They cannot be sure that they



are ready to die. Their consciences bother them. They have not lived perfect lives. Perhaps they will not be accepted into heaven.

Teaching believers the assurance of salvation is not a small matter. Nor is it simply a question of having the correct understanding of biblical teaching. Having assurance of salvation involves both correct doctrine and a right relationship with Jesus Christ. Without an assurance that they belong to Christ and are ready to meet the Lord whenever God calls them home, Christians will fear sickness and death very greatly.

## **SANCTIFICATION – Growing in a Life of Holiness – A Present, Daily Experience**

### **1. Christians need to experience daily cleansing from sin and the filling of the Holy Spirit so that all feelings of guilt are gone and they are able to show the fruit of the Spirit.**

To be saved, of course, does not mean that one may continue in sin. The Bible clearly states that any person “in Christ” is a “new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17). By definition a Christian is one who does not live in sin. “No-one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No-one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him” (I John 3:6).

Once a person repents of his sin and trusts in Christ to save him, he becomes a child of God. Christians need to learn the love of God despite their sin, and to know the cleansing blood of Christ for their sin. Every child must grow if he is to remain healthy. In the same way, every Christian must grow in a life of holiness. He should learn to walk by the Spirit as he is filled by the Spirit.

Spiritual breathing is necessary for every person who trusts Christ for salvation. Physically, we breathe out stale air which includes carbon dioxide, and we breath in rich, life-giving oxygen. Without breathing we cannot live physically. Without Spiritual breathing we cannot know and experience the life-giving power of God in us. How then do we breath spiritually?

Breathing out the stale air of the spirit involves confession of sin. Every Christian must know and love the Word of God. As God’s Word is welcomed by faith and obeyed, the believer becomes aware of those times when he displeases God. Whenever he sins he should know the joy and privilege of

being able to confess his sins to God with full confidence that God, for Christ's sake, will forgive his sins (I John 1:9).

To breath rich, life-giving air into our spirits is to invite the Holy Spirit to fill us every day. The Holy Spirit lives in the heart of every believer. If the Holy Spirit does not live within someone, that person is not a child of God (Romans 8:9). But it is possible for a child of God to fall into selfish habits, influenced by his fallen, sinful nature. In order for the Christian to manifest the nature of God he must invite the Holy Spirit to fill him daily so that God's Spirit may control him, guide him, possess him and energise him (Ephesians 5:18-20). Only when he is filled by the Spirit can the Christian manifest the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 6:22f).

Being filled with the Spirit means that the Christian is filled with those very qualities needed to face sickness and possible death. Joy is possible because of our hope in God. Peace keeps the mind cool and steady because we know the Lord who is over all. Patience enables a Christian to carry on even during times of trouble. Anyone who knows that his sins are forgiven and that he is right with God will experience an inner assurance that strengthens him during times of trouble.

## **2. Christians need to know and feel that Christ is near them; that Christ continues to know, love and care for them, even in times of sickness and death.**

Because many Christians want to recover from sickness quickly, they desire help to be near and immediate. When God does not choose to heal quickly, these Christians may have many doubts and believe that God is far away. They may not be strong in their Christian faith. They may believe that witchcraft is more powerful and can affect them. In their fear and doubt they turn to the witchdoctor.

This problem is not present among all Christians, nor is it a real problem in every area. Paul grew up in a strong church. His parents opposed witchcraft. His own grandfather had been a witchdoctor who was later saved and became a pastor. So Paul never felt this to be a problem in his area.

But for many others, even in mission centres, African Traditional Religion has a grip on the people. They do not have a strong faith that God is near, that

He can heal and take care of them. These weak Christians go to the witchdoctor for help, saying that the God of the missionaries is not as real as the traditional powers and rites.

The people of God in the Old Testament could testify of their security in the Lord (Psalm 91). The threat of death by an enemy did not trouble the writer of this Psalm for God was his refuge and fortress (91:2-5). Diseases bringing death did not trouble this child of God, for nothing outside of the loving will of God could touch him (91:6-11). He could even step on a snake or stumble upon a lion hiding in the bush without fear (91:13). "Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name" (91:14). Psalm 91 should be learned by every Christian so that it can be quoted with confidence when facing serious sickness or death.

Even though the writer of Psalm 91 lived before Christ, he knew and experienced God's personal and loving care. "He is *my* refuge and *my* fortress, *my* God, in whom I *trust*" (91:2, emphasis mine; see also 91:9). God is so close that He is like a mother hen who protects her young chicks by stretching out her wings to cover them (91:4). Fear is unknown (91:5). He could call upon the Lord and had assurance that God would hear him (91:15).

This Psalm of course does not teach that the believer can escape the results of sin in this world (see Genesis 2:15-17; 3:16-24). The Christian, though saved from eternal death, lives in a body containing the seeds of physical death. Pain, suffering, sickness and eventual death is the lot of every child of Adam and Eve. Even God says of the believer in Psalm 91, "I will be with him in trouble" (91:15). Trouble does come to a child of God. But God's loving presence will never leave him. God's sovereign, strong arm will keep him in God's perfect will.

Nor does the Psalm teach that it is God's will for every believer to be spared from the attack of the enemy. Psalm 91:11f was applied to the life of Christ by Satan himself (Matthew 4:6). Yet we know that Jesus was spat upon, beaten and finally hung on a cross as a result of the jealousy of religious leaders.

While hanging on the cross Jesus felt the pain of the Father forsaking Him (Psalm 22:1ff). Though we also may feel that God is far from us during times of trouble (Palm 22:11), yet we are assured that God has not despised our suffering nor hidden his face from us. He has heard our prayers even though His will may be different from our wish (Psalm 22:24).

Another Scripture which every Christian should memorise is Romans 8:28-39. Nothing can separate us from the love of God (8:35-39). Not even demons can separate us from His love. This does not mean, of course, that Christians do not have painful experiences. But our confidence is this: because God has chosen us in Christ, "in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (8:28). "All things" may include accidents, sickness, pain and even death. But God is over all. He is all-powerful and full of love. Because we have confidence that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him," we can follow the advice of James: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds" (James 1:2).

### **3. Whatever Christians experience in life, they must learn to trust in God who is sovereign, full of love and who has all power.**

God does have power to heal the sick, cast out evil spirits and defeat the devil in a moment. This we shall speak of later. But the Bible simply does not teach that health and healing are provided for everyone along with their salvation. Nor does experience teach this. We live in a fallen world and we all suffer for the sin of Adam and Eve. We cannot escape pain, suffering and death in this life. It comes to everyone, saint and sinner alike.

Job, a blameless and upright man who feared God (Job 1:1), suffered greatly, losing his family, wealth and personal health. Though he cried out to God for help, there was silence for a long time. Behind the whole experience was the sovereign Lord. The purpose of Job's trouble was that God might receive honour and glory through a man of faith who continued to believe God even though he suffered (Job 1:8-2:10). In the end God rewarded Job for his faith and patience (Job 42:10-17).

Paul was troubled by a "thorn in my flesh," probably some physical illness (2 Corinthians 12:1-10). Though Paul prayed three times for healing, God denied his request. Instead of healing God provided grace to endure. God has a good reason for doing what He did. It was to help Paul remain humble while experiencing so many special blessings from God.

Habakkuk has a problem with God. "How long O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?" (Habakkuk 1:2) "Why?" is a question we often have as Christians. God seemed to be unjust and He did not answer the prayer of Habakkuk. During the time Habakkuk had so many questions, God taught

him that “the righteous will live by his faith “ (Habakkuk 2:4). Though God does not seem to answer prayer, though injustice is widespread, though God does not do what we think He should, we must simply trust in His sovereign will.

In the end Habakkuk worshipped God with these wonderful words of faith:

Though the fig-tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines,  
though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food,  
though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls,  
yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour.  
(Habakkuk 3:17f)

“And without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6). Mature Christians must learn by God’s grace to trust the Lord even when the world is falling apart. Joy in the Lord during times of famine and disease is possible when we walk by faith. This is an experience that requires practical learning. It cannot be learned in the classroom or church building. We can be taught these truths from the Bible in church. But they must be learned in a practical way during times of testing and trouble.

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains  
fall into the heart of the sea, though its water roar and foam and the  
mountains quake with their surging.” (Psalm 46:1-3)

When a child of God learns to experience the real presence of the eternal Creator during times of testing, he can “be still, and know” (Psalm 46:10) the safety and security found in the loving Father.

#### **4. The Christian must experience the power of God by knowing victory over the evil one.**

Christians must develop an outlook on life filled with courage, faith and hope because of who they are in Christ. A born again Christian is chosen of God, holy and dearly loved (Colossians 3:12); a child of God (John 1:12); a citizen of heaven already seated in heaven (Philippians 3:20; Ephesians 2:6) along with the rest of God’s family (Ephesians 2:19); a member of a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God (1 Peter

2:9fa); an heir of God (Galatians 4:6f), a co-heir with Christ, sharing His heritage with Him (Romans 8:17); and a friend of Christ (John 15:15).

Because of who we are in Christ, we have every right to be free from the many fears brought upon us by the evil one. The mind is the first place where Satan attacks the believer. What the mind thinks will determine what a person does or says. Therefore, every believer must resist the evil one who tempts him or her to doubt and fear.

God has provided us with spiritual weapons to resist the devil (Ephesians 6:10-18). With God's strength the believer can "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4f). Satan is able to place thoughts of fear and doubt into the mind of the believer. But the believer has everything he needs to resist those doubts and fears. Martin Luther said something like this: "You cannot stop a bird from settling on your head, but you can prevent it from building a nest in your hair." We cannot prevent a doubt or a fear from entering our minds. But we can refuse, in the name of Jesus, to continue thinking those thoughts.

But we must be prepared for spiritual battle. What is needed to defeat the evil one? The answer is seen in Ephesians 6:10-18.

(a) Salvation from our sins: **"the helmet of salvation."** The most vital part of our body is the head. A serious blow on the head will destroy us. Therefore, the head needs protection. The first line of defence against the evil one is to be saved from our sins and to know it.

(b) Christ-like character: **"the belt of truth...the breastplate of righteousness."** The second most vital part of the body is the middle part where all the vital organs are found. The belt and breastplate are representative of the armour every soldier should wear. These represent the character of the believer. If we are to overcome the evil one we must be living lives that are true and right before God. Anyone living a lie, living contrary to the will of God, has opened himself up to the attacks of Satan.

(c) The Word of God: **"the sword of the Spirit."** No Christian can be strong unless he hears, believes and obeys the Word of God. Joshua was commanded to lead the children of Israel into the promised land and defeat the enemy. How could Joshua do this? "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your

mouth,” the Lord said. “Meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful” (Joshua 1:8).

(d) Prepared to share the gospel with others: **“feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.”** The good news of Jesus Christ should be in the heart and on the lips of God’s children. The best defence against the devil is a good offensive – being prepared to move here and there with a witness to God’s saving grace.

(e) Faith/trust/confidence: **“the shield of faith.”** What does a Christian do when he is attacked with “the flaming arrows” of doubt and fear? Without a living, vital, abiding faith in God he will collapse in defeat. Faith is a gift of God which comes from hearing the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17).

(f) Prayer: **“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.”** Prayer is the talk of children, asking their father for help. Prayer is a confession that we cannot defeat the devil in our own strength. As Jesus said, “Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine ... apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4f).

God has provided all that we need for victory through Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. Falling into doubt and fear is simply not necessary, nor is it God’s will. As John wrote, “I write this to you so that you will not sin” (1 John 2:1). But victory depends in part on every believer using the weapons God has given to resist the devil.

**5. The power of God must be seen and experienced by God’s people. God the Almighty has all power to heal the sick, cast out demons and defeat the devil, whenever He so desires.**

God’s power is often shown when we are stretched to our limit. Sarah was barren, She had not children (Genesis 11:30). When God chose 75-year-old Abraham and promised to make him the father of a great nation, Sarah had no children. Though God continued to appear to Abraham and to renew His promise, He also continued to delay the fulfilment of His promise. When Abraham was 99 years old God revealed Himself to Abraham as “God Almighty” (*El Shaddai*) (Genesis 17:1), and repeated His promise that Sarah would have a child. The following year the Lord appeared to Abraham and promised specifically, “about this time next year” Sarah would have a child

(Genesis 18:10). Sarah laughed to herself in unbelief (18:12). But the Lord responded, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (18:14) And so it happened when Abraham was 100 years old, 25 years after the first promise, that God fulfilled His promise and gave Sarah a child in her old age.

Several truths are taught in the life of Abraham: (1) God is all-powerful. Nothing is impossible for Him. God can cause the barren to bear children. He can also heal the sick and raise the dead, if he so desires. (2) But God is not always pleased to answer our prayers the way we desire, nor fulfil his promises the moment we want. God is sovereign. We cannot put God in a box. We cannot force Him to do what we want, when we want it. Nor can we use prayer like many use magic. Magic is used to do what we want done – "My will be done." But prayer involves submitting to God's will. "Thy will be done." (3) Faith is essential in our relationship with God. Yes, Abraham was a "friend" of God (2 Chronicles 20:7). But Abraham also confessed that God Almighty was LORD. We cannot command earthly "lords." How much less can we command the Lord of the universe? It was in the context of Abraham's faith in God that James recalled that he was "God's friend" (James 2:23). Abraham was God's friend because he trusted God.

We need to have great faith in the living God whom we know as our Lord and Saviour. God is able to answer prayer for physical needs. But we must also accept God's sovereign will over us. Faith is essential for both – to receive from God a wonderful answer to prayer, or to wait patiently on Him when He chooses not to answer us when and how we would wish.

God can and does heal miraculously and through medicines. Part of Jesus' ministry was to heal the sick (Mathew 4:23). The apostle John calls these miracles of healing "signs," for the miracles of healing pointed to the power and deity of Jesus Christ (compare John 2:11, 23). Sometimes people think that sickness is due to some sin. For example, the disciples asked Jesus concerning a man born blind, "... Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life' (John 9:2f). Jesus' miraculous healing of the blind man was recognised as a "sign" (9:16b) and it led to the man believing.

The early apostles continued that ministry of healing (Acts 3:1-10). Through these miracles the early church showed the power of the gospel. The



church became strengthened and grew as a result of people believing (Acts 5:12-16; 8:13; 14:3). Whenever God chooses he can give a gift of healing to particular Christians (1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 29f). The apostle James gave instructions to the early churches. "Is anyone of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well" (James 5:14f).

We find a tragedy today in the church of Jesus Christ. Some Christians, because of their theology, lack of faith or because of cultural pressures, tend to downplay divine healing. They believe that people were healed in the past, but do not take the Scriptures seriously by believing that God can and does heal the sick today. Other Christians, in reaction to this negative approach, have overplayed the importance of healing. They have developed a theology which ignores the sovereignty of God. Healing is considered the right of every believer if he or she has enough faith, and is without sin.

The church of Jesus Christ must believe in God's desire and power to heal the sick. Through miraculous healing, people's faith can be strengthened and the unsaved come to know the Lord. The church can grow as people see the power of God meeting their needs.

But we must also understand that more important than healing is the glory we can bring to God through our faith. God is glorified when we continue to trust him during times of sickness and death. Faith is often strengthened when we are made to trust God in the dark. Satan dismissed the faith of Job because God had been so good to him. God showed Satan that Job's faith, and his faithfulness to Him, were not due to his good fortune and health. But this meant Job had to suffer in order to glorify God.

Driving out demons was also a major emphasis in Jesus' ministry (Mark 1:39) and in the ministry of the twelve apostles (Mark 3:14f). The power of Christ over the evil spirits was proof that the kingdom of God had come (Luke 11:20). After Christ ascended to heaven the apostles continued to cast out demons in the name of Jesus (Acts 16:16-18). It continues to be the privilege and right of the Christian church to day to rebuke and exorcise evil spirits in the name of Jesus for the glory of God.

As people see more and more of the power of God manifest in concrete ways, they will grow in confidence that God is not far away nor unconcerned

with their lives. God's power is real and we can trust Him to show His power whenever He chooses to do so.

**6. The Christian church must provide the support and encouragement needed during times of sickness and death so that believers can resist the temptation of turning to the powers of darkness.**

Growing in faith and obedience to the Lord cannot be done by one believer on their own, separated from the Body of Christ. We need one another. When a person is saved, he is baptised into the church of Jesus Christ. The Christians in each church must be active in caring for one another.

Her lies a great problem. The pastor and elders need to visit the church members in order to comfort them whenever a need arises, to read the Scriptures, to exhort them and to pray with them. But they often do not. If a pastor is responsible for four churches or more, how can he visit the members scattered far and wide whenever they become sick or are in need? The elders need to do this, but they often fail. Yet the sickened moral support and encouragement whenever they find themselves in trouble.

This sharing and fellowship needs to become practical. The people of God need to stand by one another when a fellow believer is in financial or material need. When believers see that their local church is concerned about them, they will develop courage to stand firm against the temptations of the devil.

Members in many churches do, in fact, help one another during times of sickness and death. During the Sunday service they may announce the need of a certain brother or sister in the church. Normally Christians go to the home of the needy after church. They visit the homes sharing the Word of God, singing and encouraging them in the Lord, supporting them financially, helping with the work in the fields and giving them food.

**GLORIFICATION – Receiving Resurrection Bodies in Heaven – Our Future Hope**

**1. Christians will receive glorified bodies (resurrection bodies) when they are raised from the dead in the last day, when Jesus returns to earth. Our salvation will not be complete until this happens.**

During our growth in holiness throughout life in this world, we ought also to grow in our understanding of what will happen to us after we die. We need to be taught the word of God so we can grow in faith and confidence to face death when it comes. When Christ returns to the earth we shall all receive our resurrection bodies. When people know and understand this, and what their hope is in Christ after death, they will be greatly encouraged and face death with confidence and faith.

The following steps need to be taken in this life during the process of growing in grace, so that we can be ready for that great day when we shall die and enter into the presence of the Lord.

**2. The destiny of the believer – life with Christ in heaven after death must be taught thoroughly.**

People fear what they do not know. Christians do not know about life after death because no one teaches them the Word of God on this subject. Though some churches may have a trained pastor of their own, many pastors have five, ten, sometimes fifteen to twenty churches for which they are responsible. This means that untrained elders lead the worship in the churches most of the time. For one reason or another no one teaches the people about sickness, death and life after death. So people do not know. As a result they fear death.

Many believers, therefore, do not know the difference between the judgement of Christians and the judgement of unbelievers. They do not know what will happen to them when they die, nor do they know with certainty whether or not they are ready to meet God.

Clear teaching from God's Word concerning death and life following death will go a long way to assure people. When this assurance is combined with a knowledge that God has forgiven their sins and that they are God's children and belong to Him, they will be able to face death with faith and hope (see chapter eleven of the book).

**3. The victory of Christ over death must be stressed.**

The reason Christians need not fear death is because Christ destroyed the sting of death when He died and rose again in victory over the grave. 1 Corinthians 15 is a key passage (see chapter twelve of the book). Because Christ died and rose again from the dead,

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

“Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the poser of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through  
our Lord Jesus Christ. (15:54b-57)

#### **4. The blessed hope of believers must be taught.**

Life is ever full of problems of one sort or another. Discouragements come. Christians may fear and fall away from their faith. They need to be inspired with the hope they have in Christ Jesus, a hope that is fixed on the return of Christ, the resurrection of the body and eternity with Christ in heaven (see chapter thirteen of the book). These “last things”, usually grouped together under the term, eschatology (Greek: *eschatos* = “last”), are the crown and completion of the believer’s salvation. Within the fullness of that salvation is included “the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

### **Conclusion**

The proposed evangelical solution to the problem of death in Africa which has been given above is a pastoral solution rooted in biblical theology. If pastors and elders would counsel, teach and shepherd their people so that they are rightly related to Christ and know the full and rich salvation which is their in Him, the fear of death and the temptation to backslide would be gone.

In fact, many Christians in Africa have no fear of death. They are not tempted to return to the mediums and seek protection and help from the living-dead. They have been well taught and grounded in their Christian faith. For them the solution has been applied. For most however, the above solution must be patiently and faithfully applied as pastors and elders teach the Christians concerning the rich and full salvation which is theirs in Christ.

### **Bibliography**

Oberman. *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart, trans. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.